



## **CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON  
THURSDAY, 27TH JUNE 2019 AT 5.00 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Mr C. Davies - Vice-Chair

Task Group Members:

M. James, S. Jones, D. Moore, L. Pewtner, L. Phipps, R. Thompson and L.G. Whittle

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Co-Ordination Manager), P. Smythe (Housing Technical Manager) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Davies, L. Harding, A. Hussey, B. Jones and D. Price and Tenant Representatives Y. Bryant.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Tenant Representatives C. Davies, M. James, S. Jones, D. Moore, L. Pewtner and R. Thompson declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items as they are Council Tenants.

### **3. MINUTES – 16TH MAY 2019**

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 16th May 2019 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2019 (minute no. 1-6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **4. WHQS PROGRESS REPORT – FINAL STAGES**

The report provided Members with an overview of the performance of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Team to date and also provided the anticipated projected

performance up to December 2020, prior to its consideration by the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and thereafter Cabinet.

It was noted that details of the year end outturn for 2018/19 for WHQS works were also included, together with an overview of the many achievements that have been made as part of the wider commitments and benefits delivered by the WHQS programme.

In addition, the report detailed further changes to the sheltered housing schemes where survey results have necessitated in two further schemes having to be omitted from the programme, and transferred to the Post 2020 asset management programme on the grounds of health and safety.

The details contained within the report provided information on current and projected performance of the internal and external works main WHQS programme and demonstrated that the achievement of full compliance is achievable prior to the deadline of December 2020.

It was noted that good progress has been made with surveys which are now almost 100% complete, which provides more detail on the scope of anticipated works, which assist with contract forecasting and budget monitoring. As at the 31st March 2019, internal works are 85% compliant, external works 71%, with overall compliance currently at 57%.

The Task Group were informed that at the start of this financial year it was necessary to transfer 43 sheltered properties out of the WHQS programme into the Post 2020 Asset Management programme for health & safety reasons which were detailed within the body of the report.

The energy efficiency schemes have been delivered throughout the borough since the commencement of the programme, with approximately a third of the housing stock now benefitting from external wall insulation. The latest scheme at Lansbury Park seeing the completion of all Council owned properties and approximately 50% of the privately owned properties. A further bid for additional funding has been submitted to Welsh Government (WG) for the remainder of the private properties and a response is awaited. Funding for other areas will also continue to be pursued as this work will assist in addressing fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions for the benefit of all.

Discussions took place around Customer feedback and it was noted that customers feedback was generally demonstrated a high level of satisfaction. It is accepted that levels of customer satisfaction for external works continues to be less than those received for internal works and as a result, the current practice has been reviewed telephone surveys in the first instance have been introduced.

It was noted that consultation to identify environmental projects continues throughout the borough with many projects having now been delivered. A number of large-scale projects have also been identified and officers are working with in-house service colleagues to ensure that specific WHQS projects are delivered within our programme deadlines.

The current and projected financial position is set out within the report and borrowing has been required for the first time since the programme commencement in the sum of £23m. It is also confirmed that the housing business plan remains financially viable throughout the programme and to deliver the post 2020 strategy.

The WHQS programme has also resulted in community benefits being achieved with the provision of training opportunities, work placements, permanent jobs and apprenticeships created with the in-house service, external contractors and our supply partner. The Value Wales Toolkit also demonstrates the positive effect the Council's WHQS investment has on the wider community.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group (The Task Group) thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Task Group Member raised a number of concerns in relation to the works of external contractors within their area, with particular reference to a lack quality control, resulting in contractors being required to attend properties on several occasions in order to provide a more satisfactory service. In addition, concerns were raised around the Tenant Liaison Officers and Clerk of Works and their communication and ensuring the Charter for Trust was being adhered to. Officers requested that details be provided following the meeting, which would be followed up. In reference to the issues with Contractors, it was noted that these have been highlighted through Customer Feedback, as a result, Officers are ensuring that Contractors revisit tenants and correct their work and bring tasks to an acceptable standard. This can result in a number of visits to the tenant, thus causing stress and inconvenience, however, the aim is to ensure that the finished work is to an acceptable standard and it is hoped that Contractors are also abiding by the Standards of Conduct required, and the Task Group were encouraged to contact Officers to report any further issues outside of the meeting.

The Energy Efficiency Programme post 2020 was discussed and it was noted that whilst some properties within the borough would have received cladding or insulation, this was not originally planned as part of the WHQS programme, however there is a programme to follow, to consider the Energy Efficiency of the Caerphilly Homes. A group member enquired why only two properties in a street had received external wall insulation. The officer advised that this should not have occurred as attempts are made to carry out such work on a street or area basis and to access grant funding.

Discussions took place around Contractors employed to undertake External Works, with particular reference to recent notifications of a Contractor going into administration. Officers confirmed the situation in relation to the contractor and assured the Task Group that every effort is being undertaken to ensure that works continue, however this has caused a number of delays. Members of the Task Group were assured that numerous checks are undertaken of contractors prior to award of contract, but that many circumstances which may impact of the contractors following award, are outside the Council's control. It was also noted that Contractors are not paid until works are completed to a satisfactory level, although attempts to work with contractors are made to ease cash flow.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's Report the report be noted, prior to its consideration by the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 23 July 2019 and thereafter the position and approach being taken to deliver this programme is considered and ratified by Cabinet on 24 July 2019.

## **5. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – OUTTURN 2018/19**

The report informed Members of the outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2018/19 financial year.

The Task Group were reminded of the distinction between the HRA, which is funded by rental income received from council tenants, to that of General Fund Housing and Private Housing, which fall under the General Fund and is funded via the Council taxpayer.

Although there is a clear separation of these funds which is ring-fenced to directly benefit the service for which the income relates to, the majority of council tenants rent is funded from

housing benefits which is derived from the tax payers purse and therefore value for money must always be sought.

The report outlined the final outturn for the HRA based upon the expenditure and income for the full financial year.

It was noted that the HRA budget for 2018/19 was £49.5m which mainly includes £17.5m of salaries, £7.9m of capital financing charges, £8.7m of response repairs, and £16.9m of revenue contributions to fund the WHQS programme. The underspend in 2018/19 totalled £5.46m and the main reason for the underspend were detailed within the report and were as a result of underspends in Salaries and Mileage, Capital Financing Charges, Service Specific Related and Office Related, Building Maintenance and Revenue Contribution to Capital.

The report will be presented to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 23rd July 2019.

The Task Group thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the Underspends, as outlined within the report and how this money would be allocated going forward. Officers explained that the Underspend would be reallocated to the current budget and support the ongoing delivery of the WHQS programme.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's Report the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the content of the Report and recommended it consideration at Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 23rd July 2019.

## **6. WHQS LOCAL EMPLOYMENT FUND**

The report advised Members of the work undertaken in relation to the WHQS Employment Fund.

It was noted that following the ballot in February 2012, the Council agreed that it would deliver the promises made in its Offer Document to tenants and deliver WHQS by 31 March 2020. It also gave a commitment to delivering numerous additional benefits which would add to the WHQS programme and help deliver the Council's ambition of using the WHQS investment as a catalyst to Transform Homes, Lives and Communities.

These additional benefits included the commitment to create a Local Employment Fund to support the development of local community employment projects that aimed to support tenants to move from unemployment/ inactivity into sustainable employment.

At the time, employment support provision was dominated by the Department for Work and Pensions, Welsh Government and projects that were delivered by agencies in receipt of European Funding. There were very few 'community' employment support projects in existence that could benefit from the Local Employment Fund. As a result a decision was made (2 April 2015) to allocate an annual budgetary contribution of £50,000 to support and add value to the delivery of the WG funded employment support provision delivered at that time by Communities First.

The report outlined that following the demise of Communities First in March 2018 the £50,000 has continued to be allocated adding value to the new Welsh Government employment support programmes (Legacy and Communities4work and Communities4Work Plus) on the basis that the individuals and families that the team are dealing with on a daily basis are

predominantly Council tenants.

The report further outlined the activities undertaken by the Community Regeneration team as a result of the WHQS investment provided.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group (the Task Group) thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

In considering the report, further information was sought on the support provision available, following the completion of WHQS in 2020. Officers explained that whilst there is no commitment to continue the support, there will be support provisions in place for Tenants, which will be discussed and finalised at a later date.

In discussion the report and points at 5.11, the Task Group sought further information on the employment successes for participants. Officers explained that they were not able to provide the data at the meeting; however, information would be circulated.

Discussions took place around the Community Hubs and the organisations utilising them. It was noted that there are a range of organisations using the Community Hubs, including Citizens Advice Bureau, Mental Health Support Agencies, Food Banks, Debt Management Agencies, Employment Support Teams and Parent Groups. Officers added that they were pleased with the increase in take up, with particular reference to the support projects for tenants to get back into employment, supporting the Out of Poverty Agenda.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the Passport Officer, as referenced in 5.4 of the report. It was noted that this was originally a programme to support young people accessing the workforce through Council roles or apprenticeships with CCBC or Contractors, which is no longer in place and was recognised as an exemplary project by Welsh Government. Similar projects are available now however, but offer support to tenants of all ages.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer and noted the report.

## **7. TO RECEIVE ANY REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA**

The Task Group requested that the following items be presented to the next meeting:

1. Asset Management Strategy for the next 30 Years.

The meeting closed at 6:20pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2019.

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CHAIR